



Truffles: Earth's Black Diamonds

By Annemie Dedulle, Toni Coninck

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The mysteries of a natural gourmet treasure.

Truffles are the naturally growing, fragrant and prized fungus of European forests. In this gorgeous book, truffle importer Annemie Dedulle, known as "Ms. Truffle," and culinary author Toni de Coninck reveal the most intimate secrets of these elusive delicacies that fetch exorbitant prices.

Truffles features lush color photographs of the Hungarian and Italian countryside where truffles grow and the hunters, chefs and connoisseurs (and dogs) whose lives revolve around them.

The book covers such topics as:

- What is a truffle?
- The history of truffles
- Types of truffles
- Products featuring truffles
- Hunting for truffles
- What to look for when purchasing truffles
- Truffles and wine
- Map of Europe showing where truffles are found.

A book on truffles would not be complete, however, if it did not provide recipes. The authors and the chefs of three renowned European restaurants share such delectable recipes as:

- Omelet with black and white truffles
- Truffle salad
- Sole with black truffle
- Fresh truffle risotto.

Truffles is a loving celebration of the coveted truffle -- an essential choice for chefs, gourmet shops, cooking schools and foodies everywhere.

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Truffles: Earth's Black Diamonds By Annemie Dedulle, Toni Coninck **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Review

The Romans believed [truffles] were created where lightning struck the earth. Churchill and Napoleon, among many others, were devotees. Other fans, or keen cooks, will want this large-format, lavishly illustrated book, which offers the last word on all things truffle; from the mysteries of the tubers' existence and where and how to buy them, to the many varieties available and the fun to be had hunting for them in France, Italy and elsewhere. The last third of the book is devoted to recipes. (Clover Stroud *Telegraph* 2009-11-23)

About the Author

Since 2000 **Annemie Dedulle** has run a business harvesting and selling truffles to top restaurants in Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

Toni de Coninck is head editor of *UIT-magazine*, a Dutch lifestyle publication, and the author of several gastronomy books.

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Excerpt

This book talks about the truffle, but it's also the story of Annemie Dedulle, former grand master of the order, non-existent in Belgium, of the truffle. Annemie has been importing this product from known or lesser-known truffle regions and she is familiar with most of the gourmet restaurants in our country. Truffles are her trade, her passion and her life's work.

"I discovered fresh truffles during my studies at the Spermalie hotel school in Bruges. I was sixteen years old. After much hesitation, the school had purchased half a kilo as the decoration for an important banquet -- a huge purchase! I don't remember if they were autumn or summer truffles, white or black -- we didn't distinguish between them. However, maybe it's only my memory that is failing with respect to this detail. We had simply purchased 'truffles' that were stored in a cold room in the kitchen. The next day, the cleaning woman found that there was a musty, slightly sickening smell in the room. When she looked for the source, she discovered a small pile of rotten 'potatoes,' clearly abandoned by negligent students. She wrapped the truffles in newspaper and threw everything into the garbage. Unfortunately, it was also garbage day. When the chefs at Spermalie discovered the horrible mistake, the whole school was put on alert. There was a big investigation and everyone was questioned. Until the cleaning woman triumphantly mentioned that she had rid the school of a persistent rotting smell. This is how the first truffles in my life disappeared, straight into the incinerator of Bruges.

After my studies and a few jobs in the commercial area, I opened a wholesale business for fine foods in Nieuport. I supplied smoked salmon, caviar and foie gras to restaurants. When I was asked for truffles, I initially bought them from a Dutch importer. However, as a good Flemish woman, I wanted to know more about this mysterious mushroom. My research began at the Anuga exchange, which, at that time, was one of the biggest food fairs in the world. Next, I decided to go to a major Italian truffle company to propose to the managers that I distribute their products in Belgium but this led nowhere. I couldn't see myself in their

attitude, their way of working, their craziness for size. They saw themselves as the *crème de la crème*. As a result, I quickly abandoned the plan.

By looking for another producer, I met Giampaolo Menichini. His was a modest business, but his products had a particularly fine taste, and he also placed a lot of importance on packaging and on the finished product. We spoke in complete confidence, and I learned my first Italian words. Paolo gave me a few products to take with me. From then on, I was faced with a new challenge: the wholesaling of truffles and their by-products.

My first order consisted of six small pots of *salsa tartufata* and four cartons of truffle oil. The shipment weighed just under 10 kilos. Paolo had insisted that I pay in advance. After a few months, I had selected some of his products and ordered that which I felt would fill a void in our market. My intuition was good; to this day, these remain the most successful: paste, *salsa tartufata*, oils, sterilized truffles and, naturally, fresh truffles.

This business trip was more like a school trip that went increasingly out of control. In Rome, I began by taking the Eurostar to Foligno (nothing to do with the Brussels-London link!), where I switched to the local bus headed for Spello. As I remember it, we drove for hours through the peaceful countryside of Umbria. Once I arrived in Spello, I realized that Il Tartufo di Paolo, a small business belonging to the Menichini family, was certainly located in this beautiful village, but far from its center, on an unpaved road regularly impassable when it rains. Even if the authorities built a small bridge to access it, more often than not people resigned to waiting until the water receded.

If, during this first visit, I was not, obviously, initiated into the true secrets of the company, I was very warmly welcomed in an atmosphere of trust. Paolo taught me all kinds of things about fresh truffles and the different varieties. I learned that there are more than two hundred kinds of truffles, but only about twenty are used in cooking. He also explained what to look for when buying truffles, how to store them, how he hunts for truffles. Today, Paolo employs eight people and a veritable factory has risen up near his house.

Paolo took me to lunch at the local trattoria and advised me to order fresh truffle on toast as an antipasto. It was autumn and they were serving *Tuber uncinatum*, a late-summer, brown-veined truffle with a better aroma and more pronounced taste than that of the classic summer truffle. The waiter prepared the dish at our table. He started by rubbing the bruschetta with extra-virgin olive oil. Next he sprinkled a little sea salt and grated a fair bit of truffle over it. To top it all off, he added a few turns of the pepper mill and a few extra drops of oil. With this, he served us an Italian Chardonnay. It was the first time that I tasted fresh truffle and I found it heavenly. Today, this toast remains my favorite dish! It's simple: I was so impressed by the dish that I completely forget all the qualities of the wine.

Later, I decided to give up my general wholesale business to devote myself entirely to truffles. This wasn't without its problems. It was the end of the previous century and I had to spend each day convincing my customers of the qualities of my truffles and their by-products. It took two years for me to build up a clientele worthy of the name.

Over the years, I continued to learn a lot about truffles. I read, travelled, tasted and smelled. I still remember the scent of the first fresh, white truffle (*Tuber magnatum pico*) that I received as if it was yesterday. What an experience! The entire cold room smelled of this small, whitish-beige tuber weighing forty grams, unfortunately almost unaffordable today.

I had a completely different experience with *bianchetti*, little sisters of the white truffle. One day, Paolo sent me a kilo, and when I opened the box, a repulsive, gassy smell escaped from it. As chance would have it, a neighbour entered right at that moment. She didn't say anything, but she must have been concerned because, one hour later, two inspectors from the gas company rang at my door to ask whether I had noticed a leak. We

had a good laugh about it after, but, in the meantime, I returned these bianchetti to their sender.

In this book, I would like to explain to readers what to watch for when buying truffles. But I also want to talk about the origins and nature of this mushroom, about the hunt for truffles, this solitary job, the seasons that must be respected, the use of truffles in cooking and the different truffle varieties. This book is for everyone, but it certainly speaks to the professional user. There are so many kinds of truffles that it's sometimes difficult to figure them out. For me, they represent a passion that I would like to share with you."

Annemie Dedulle
Text by Toni De Coninck

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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